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## Toward Squaring the Circle

Work-Life Balance  
and the Implications  
for Individuals, Firms  
and Public Policy

Richard P. Chaykowski

Work-Life Balance

IRPP



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## Work-Life Balance

Research Director / Directrice de recherche  
Sarah Fortin

This research program examines issues related to work-life balance with the goal of better defining their policy implications. It is based on a "life course" approach and takes into consideration family as well as child care issues, and also the policy imperatives associated with an aging population and changes in the labour market. Some of the questions to be covered include the following: What is an appropriate role for government in this area? What roles are appropriate for individuals, businesses and communities? What policy instruments are available to deal with this challenge? What are the regulatory or institutional barriers to adapting public policies to this new context? What are other industrialized countries doing?

Ce programme de recherche traite des questions liées à la conciliation travail-vie personnelle et vise à cerner leurs répercussions politiques. Fondé sur l'approche « parcours de vie », il tient compte des enjeux relatifs aux familles et aux soins des enfants, mais aussi des impératifs politiques découlant du vieillissement démographique et de l'évolution du marché du travail. Il pose notamment les questions suivantes : Quel rôle devrait jouer le gouvernement dans ce domaine ? Quel est le rôle des citoyens, des entreprises et des collectivités ? Quels instruments politiques permettraient de relever ce défi ? Quelles barrières réglementaires ou institutionnelles faut-il lever pour adapter les politiques gouvernementales à cette nouvelle réalité ? Que font les autres pays industrialisés ?

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# Toward Squaring the Circle

## Work-Life Balance and the Implications for Individuals, Firms and Public Policy

Richard P. Chaykowski

[I]n all age groups, in all education levels, in all occupations and in all industries, there are more Canadians who, given the choice, would prefer to work longer hours for more pay than work fewer hours for less pay. In the aggregate, for each Canadian who would choose to reduce his/her work hours, there are four Canadians who would like to work more hours.

M. Drolet and R. Morissette,  
"Working More? Working Less?"

The 1990's were a decade of change. Work-life conflict has increased markedly (particularly role overload), suggesting that a greater proportion of workers are experiencing greater challenges in balancing their role of employee, parent, spouse, elder-care giver, etc. Workers have become more stressed, physical and mental health has declined, and so has satisfaction with life. Employees' attitudes towards their jobs and employers have also changed over the decade. On the whole, jobs have become more stressful and less satisfying, and employees are less committed to their employer and are more likely to be absent from work due to ill health.

L. Duxbury and C. Higgins,  
"Work-Life Balance in the New Millennium"

### Introduction

**S**ince the 1960s, the Canadian labour market, employment, work and home life have undergone significant transformation as a result of factors such as changes in demographics, increased female participation in the labour market, increased levels of educational attainment, changes in the composition of households, the decline of traditional employment models and the rise of dual-earner families. These developments have contributed to fundamental changes in the "traditional" allocation of time between work performed in employment settings, work at home, home production and leisure.

Today, the division between home and work life is different for both males and females – and there is increased public and policy concern and debate about whether the quality of working life and home life has eroded and whether work-life balance has been

transformed into work-life conflict (see, for example, Church 2001; CAALL Ad Hoc Committee on Work-Life Balance 2002). The concern is that these developments have increased work-life conflict that manifests itself as increased reported stress, with costs to employees in terms of health, to employers arising from lost productivity and to society from increased costs of health care and other negative social outcomes.

At the same time, however, a significant minority of workers would, if given the choice, prefer to work longer hours, not fewer, in order to increase their income, despite evidence of an overall increase in the demands on workers' time. Additionally, workers who wish to work more hours typically are unable to do so, which points to the problem of externally imposed constraints on the number of hours individuals can work – or "hours constraints."

These two pictures of work life appear, at first glance, to be somewhat at odds. They raise several questions about the incidence of work-life conflict, about which classes of workers it tends to affect most and, hence, about the relevant policy options available to private and public stakeholders. Thus, different characteristics of work and the labour market must be "squared" in order to understand more fully the work-life balance issue and the most appropriate policy options.

This paper reviews the Canadian evidence and identifies the various issues associated with work-life balance. The objective is to clarify the related policy stakes in order to help define the appropriate role of government in addressing these issues, relative to that of firms or individuals themselves. The paper considers whether and how problems of work-life balance run across the whole spectrum of the working population. Does work-life conflict take on different features depending on whether one is older or younger, male or female, has a standard (full-time) or nonstandard (part-time, self-employed or contract) job? Does it arise out of a lack of revenue, rather than time?

In order to investigate these issues, I provide a critical analysis of already published, mainly Canadian, research studies. One key element is to consider the analysis of work-life balance issues from several relevant social science perspectives, including economics and industrial relations, since alternative explanations of time use and work-life time trade-offs may shed light on potential sources of work-life balance and conflict – such as workers' preferences, firm constraints or gender inequity. This multidisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis of the sources of work-life conflict.

The review proceeds in five parts. In the following section, I consider frameworks for examining the nature and implications of work-life balance and conflict. The framework that I follow builds on previous work that considers "supp'v-side" and "demand-side" considerations, along with institutional factors. I also review the nature of factors that can give rise to stress generally and, in particular, that result in work-life conflict. The third section focuses on a number of key changes in the Canadian labour market and in Canadian workplaces that have affected workers' ability to balance work and life demands. Then, since one major source of stress is the increasing demand on individuals' time both at work and at home, I examine worker preferences for hours of work, various constraints in balancing different time demands, and shifting demands on workers' time in the context of work-life conflict; I also consider some of the life-cycle aspects of the issue of work-life conflict. The paper concludes with some observations on advancing labour policy related to work-life conflict, with specific reference to employers, unions and government.

## Defining and Framing Work-Life Balance

Several basic factors in work and home life have been identified, in some combination, as giving rise to increased work-life conflict. These include long hours of work, work-scheduling constraints, a shift away from "traditional" home production arrangements toward a variety of household arrangements – including two-earner families and single-parent households – and the rise of new family responsibilities, such as elder care.

Some researchers usefully define three basic sources of work-life conflict: role overload, where demands on one's time and ability to perform exceed available time and other resources; work-family interference, where the demands of work interfere with the responsibilities and demands of family; and family-work interference, where family responsibilities and demands interfere with one's ability to fulfill the demands of work (see Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee 1994; Duxbury and Higgins 2001, 2003). Other sources of conflict also exist, of course, including "caregiver strain," which may arise from underlying financial, physical, emotional or family tensions (see Duxbury and Higgins 2003, 2).

Several explanations of potential work-life conflict have been suggested, including a "rational view" that emphasizes the relationship between hours dedicated to different activities and the likelihood of conflict arising across those activities; "socio-cultural expectations" around the activities of males and females in the labour market and in home or leisure activities; and the extent of demands placed on individuals in alternative roles relative to the control individuals have over the demands that are placed on them (see Higgins, Duxbury and Lee 1994, 145, and references therein). Embedded in these perspectives are notions of workers' preferences for different activities and the time devoted to them, constraints on workers' choices and the social norms or contexts in which workers decide how to allocate their time.

Another way to frame the understanding of work-life conflict is to consider supply-side and demand-side factors in labour market outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The number of hours of work that workers are willing to supply depends on their relative preferences for market work, market income and nonmarket activities, including leisure and home production. For example, voluntary part-time work would reflect workers' desire for a limited allocation of time to labour market activity, perhaps because of a desire to engage in longer hours of home work (see, for example, Marshall 2001, 21; Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2003, 304). These preferences can shift over time in response to changing social values or norms.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, workers might prefer to work longer hours for more pay, but are unable to do so. For example, full-time workers might want to work overtime hours that are not available to them, or involuntary part-time workers might want a full-time job but cannot obtain one. The unsatisfied preference for longer hours is also seen among those who hold multiple jobs because they are unable to obtain the hours they want from a single job.

On the demand side, employers' demand for labour services is largely a function of output demand in the product market in which they operate, the organization of production systems – which, in turn, is a function of the availability and choice of engineering technology, human resource practices and work organization – and management preferences. Increasing demand for employers' products leads to demand for more hours of labour, which is met either by increasing the hours of work of existing employees or by hiring additional employees. In the presence of payroll taxes, employers have a

greater incentive to offer more overtime than to hire more labour.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, although employers are expected to make optimal use of the labour they employ by structuring the workday or workweek according to the technology they use to create output, the structure of hours of work is often determined through employment contracts mediated by unions or government legislation. All of these considerations constrain employers' ability to structure hours as they or their workers might otherwise choose. Such "hours constraints" appear to be both substantial and prevalent in the Canadian labour market (see Drolet and Morissette 1997a,b; Noreau, 2000; Marshall 2001).

My approach is to emphasize both demand-side and supply-side factors in considering the determinants of work-life conflict. In this approach, many of the established frameworks for understanding work-life conflict can be seen as arising from either the worker (the supply) side or the firm (the demand) side of the labour market. Economic theory stresses the importance of individual choice among market work, household work and leisure activities in the context of the joint production of household outputs and, where relevant, joint decision-making (see Ehrenberg, Smith and Chaykowski 2003, 205-10; see also Killingsworth 1983; Gronau 1997). The way family members, whether they participate in the labour market or work in the home, allocate their time is, therefore, the result of a complex set of interrelated factors and decisions that could change over time.

If one assumes that a worker's wages, which reflect productivity, will grow over the first half of his or her career before levelling off or declining later on, then standard labour supply theory suggests that the supply of hours will also rise, then level off or even decline toward the end of the worker's career. Assuming that the same individual's productivity in unpaid household work stays relatively the same over time, then this result follows primarily from the fact that the worker's wage reflects the opportunity cost of time that is not devoted to work in the labour market – in the sense that the individual gives up an hour of paid employment in the labour market for every hour of unpaid work he or she pursues in home and leisure activities. That opportunity cost also rises, levels off and perhaps declines in the later years.

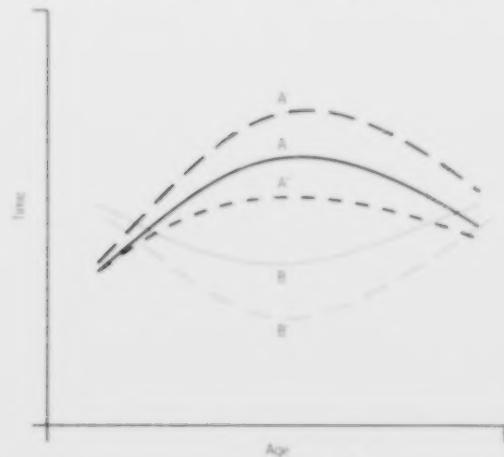
This "classical" profile of time at work is depicted in figure 1 as curve A; similarly, the "classical" time devoted to home activity, as some combination of home production and leisure, is represented by curve B.

Workers employed full time and "stretched" by extra hours, either paid or unpaid, have a time profile illustrated by curve A'; as we will see in the following section, this segment of the Canadian workforce has grown in recent years. The profile for the allocation of home time by "stretched" workers is curve B'.

Analogously, the paid-time profile for "nonstandard" or part-time workers is shown by curve A'', which everywhere lies below the "classical" curve of regular, full-time employees.

These profiles derive their curved shapes from the fact that, as workers progress through the life cycle, they continually evaluate their expected commitments of time to home production – for child rearing, elder care and so on – and leisure activities and choice of career and hours of employment. The objective here is some degree of worker-firm job matching in order to achieve work-life balance. Over time, unexpected events – such as the sudden need to care for an elderly relative – could require that the worker immediately increase the allocation of time to home. If the worker is able to reduce hours of work on the margin through, for example, a flextime option, then work-life balance is maintained. If the worker faces an unaccommodating employer or experiences other kinds of hours constraints, however, the result is added stress and work-life conflict. One way to resolve this conflict, as long as finances are not a constraint, is for the worker to reduce his or her

Figure 1  
Classical Time Profiles during Paid and Home Work



Note:

- A = Classical time during paid work
- A' = Full-time, stretched time
- A'' = Nonstandard, reduced time
- B = Classical time at home
- B' = Reduced time at home

Source: Author.

hours of work by taking a part-time job. Another option is to *increase* hours of work in order to purchase elder care services, although the trade-off in this case could be a reduction in leisure time or the need to buy home-production services, such as housecleaning or yard maintenance, which could also increase stress.

Work-life conflict thus assumes both short-run aspects as well as long-run, or life-cycle, dimensions. In the following section, I consider some of the main labour market developments that have a significant bearing on work-life balance. In some situations, these developments are pressuring individuals to make time-allocation adjustments, under constraints, that are increasing work-life conflict.

## Demographic and Labour Market Trends

**S**ince the 1960s, significant changes have taken place in the structure of the economy, the labour market and the labour force, and in the structure of government and business organizations, employment and work. The factors giving rise to these changes are many and interrelated in complex ways, and several have affected the nexus of work, family and leisure over time.<sup>1</sup> Duxbury and Higgins (2001), for example, identify the changing role of women in the labour market, the changing structure of families, demographic changes; the effects of technological change on paid work, home production and leisure; changes in the structure of work; various labour market and workplace changes, such as increased workforce diversity; and the limited response of firms to workers' increased demands for work-life balance.

Duxbury and Higgins suggest (2001, 11) that, although many of these factors have increased work-life conflict, individuals' attitudes toward work have also changed, essentially in favour of nonwork activities – in other words, fundamental changes in underlying preferences toward work and home or leisure activities have taken place over time (see Pronovost forthcoming). This last factor, while potentially critical, is difficult to quantify. From the point of view of economics, one can think of underlying preferences in terms of the value that an individual places on income versus nonmarket activities (including home work and leisure). A shift in preferences could take the form of a change in the rate at which

an individual is willing to trade off income and nonmarket time, a change in the relative value of the two or both.<sup>1</sup>

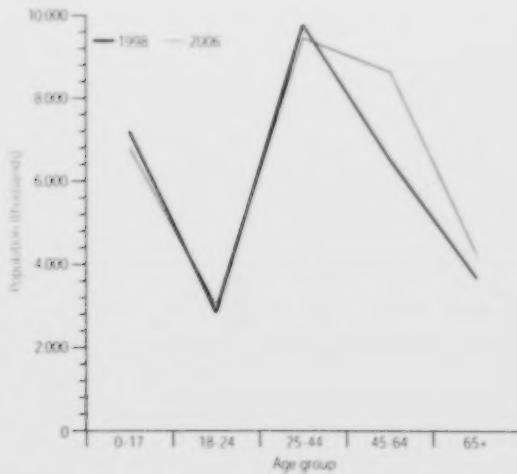
Although some or all of these types of changes can affect an individual's work-life balance, I focus here on those changes that have the greatest impact on work-life balance – namely, demographic changes, the increase in female labour force participation, the rise of nonstandard forms of employment and the change in the size distribution of firms.

### The changing age distribution of the population

The baby boom generation and following "echo" of the children of baby boomers had a significant effect on the supply of workers to the Canadian labour market, gradually increasing the median age of both the population as a whole and the labour force segment, and shifting the age distribution toward the older age groups, as figure 2 shows.<sup>2</sup>

A major concern arising from this aging population is the ratio of people of dependent age per 100 of the working-age population, which is projected to decrease through roughly 2011 but then increase steadily and significantly thereafter because of the increase in the population of those age 65 and older; the ratio of dependent children, in contrast, is expected to decrease rapidly through 2011 and level off thereafter (see figure 3). These developments strongly suggest that, over the next few years, concerns related to child care demands

**Figure 2**  
Projected Population by Age Group, Canada, 1998 and 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Statistics*, 2001 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, April 2002, cat. no. 91-213-XPB), table 1.16, p. 47.

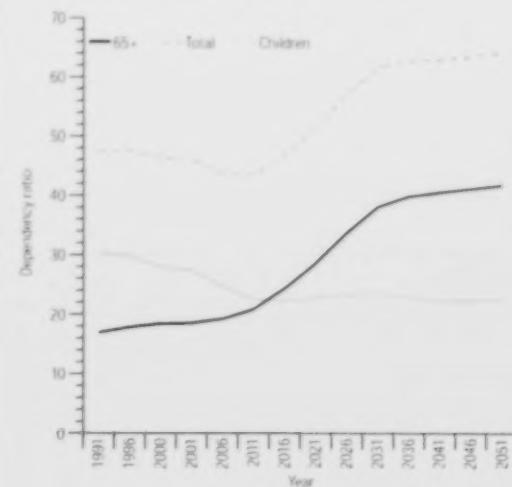
will ease while those related to elder care demands will grow. This demographic change will add to demands for the allocation of more time to home and family and supplant child care concerns as the primary source of work-life conflict (see Williams 2004); for those with responsibilities for both elder and child care, conflicts could be particularly intense.

### Increased female labour force participation rates

Perhaps the most important labour supply development of the past half-century has been the dramatic increase in participation rates of females in the labour force, rising from 23 percent in 1950 to 59.5 percent in 2000, while those of males fell from 84 percent to 72.5 percent (Statistics Canada 1983, 220-2; 2004a, 20). As figures 4 and 5 show, in the more recent period between 1976 and 2000, the greatest increase has occurred among married women, particularly those with children.

Coincident with this dramatic increase in female labour force participation rates is the propensity of employed women to continue to assume a larger share than men of home production and child and elder care, giving rise to the double burden of work and family responsibilities. Cooke-Reynolds and Zukewich (2004, 26) suggest that women who face such a double burden might seek nonstandard forms of employment, even if the result is fewer hours of

**Figure 3**  
Actual and Projected Dependency Ratios of Children and Seniors, Canada, 1991-2051

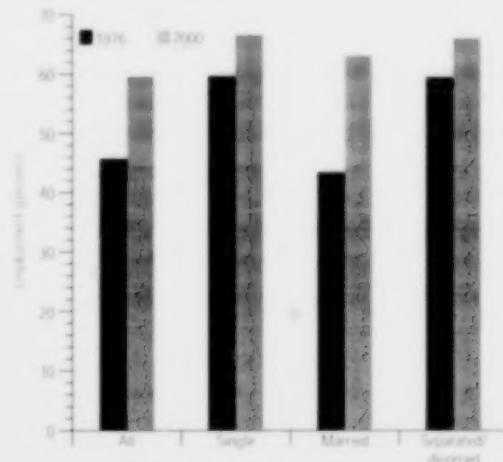


Source: Statistics Canada, *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2000-2026* (Ottawa, 2001, cat. no. 91-520-XPB), p. 77.  
Note: Dependency ratio = # dependent age /100 working age population.

work or lower wages than desired, in order to achieve a better work-life balance than if they were employed in regular, full-time jobs. Indeed, roughly one-quarter of employed women work part time (see Marshall 2001, 22; Statistics Canada 2004a, 52); among women ages 25 to 54, 44 percent work part time for family reasons, compared with only about 10 percent of men (Marshall 2001, 24, chart b).<sup>1</sup>

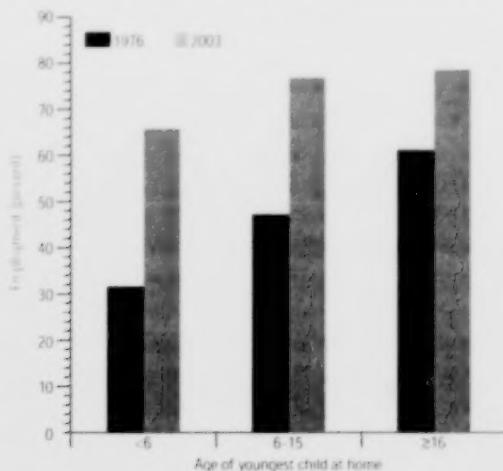
What appears to be emerging is that both men and women are making an increasingly complex

Figure 4  
Female Labour Force Participation Rates, by Marital Status, Canada, 1976 and 2000



Source: Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Historical Statistics* 2001 (Ottawa, cat. no. 71F0004XCB).

Figure 5  
Employment Rates of Women Ages 15 to 54, by Age of Youngest Child at Home, Canada, 1976 and 2003



Source: Statistics Canada, *The Canadian Labour Market at a Glance* 2003 (Ottawa, 2004, cat. no. 71-222-XWE), p. 20.

set of time-allocation decisions and trade-offs between market work (including full-time and non-standard employment) and nonmarket activities (including family responsibilities such as child and elder care). Although overall labour force participation rates of females have increased, the nature of that participation and the underlying choices and constraints reflect, for many, decisions relating to work-life balance.

### Good jobs, bad jobs: Toward the polarization of the workforce

One of the most important ways the labour market has changed in recent decades is in its institutional structures and arrangements. A combination of such factors as changing production technologies, increased competition in product markets and innovations in human resources practices have profoundly changed the nature of work, affecting work organization, hours of work and employment arrangements.<sup>2</sup> I wish to focus, however, on several interrelated outcomes of particular interest in the context of work-life balance, including the rise of the "core-periphery" employment model in organizations and the associated rise of nonstandard employment arrangements and changes in the distribution of hours of work.

### Organizational change and changes in the distribution of hours

The transformation of organizations over the past half-century has involved a general decline in reliance on internal labour markets, flatter managerial structures, a reduction in workforce size and the reorganization of work and employment arrangements. One outcome of this process is a new configuration of firm workforces, often referred to as a "core-periphery" model. In this model, the main workforce is characterized by regular, full-time jobs with favourable terms and conditions of employment. The wages of these core workers are typically competitive or even "above market" and they have a range of benefits attached to them. In addition, training and education opportunities are typically offered to core workers, and upward mobility within the organization is also possible. Offering good wages, benefits, working conditions and relatively stable employment, such core jobs are considered "good jobs."

Another outcome of the new employment model, however, is the use of a range of "peripheral" workers who have less permanent attachment to the organization and can be employed flexibly and at relatively

low cost. Such jobs typically are nonstandard, and are often characterized as "bad jobs" because wages are usually lower, benefits more limited, training opportunities highly restricted, the risk of unemployment higher and the career prospects with the employer usually limited.<sup>9</sup>

In general, nonstandard employment in the forms of part-time and contract work continued to grow until the 1990s, then levelled off; about one-third of the labour force now works in such jobs. As a proportion of total employment, full-time permanent employment declined by a modest 4 percent between 1989 and 2002, whereas temporary employment increased by about 3 percent for full-time and 1 percent for part-time work (see table 1). Although the employment distribution of females varies across different categories of nonstandard employment, much of part-time work is female-dominated.<sup>10</sup>

Another component of nonstandard employment is self-employment, which has doubled in size over the past quarter-century. In 2004, roughly 2.4 million workers, or about 14 percent of the labour force, were self-employed (Statistics Canada 2005, 29; see also Manser and Picot 1999; Delage 2002). While some of the self-employed work at the site of another business, many work out of home, which presents opportunities for flexibility in terms of work-life time allocation but also holds out the prospect that immediate work-life conflict will arise.

The rise of nonstandard forms of employment and the tendency for a growing proportion of full-time employees to work longer hours (whether the additional hours are paid or unpaid), as "good" jobs

increasingly entail (see Lapointe 2004), have increased the polarization of hours worked by both sexes. As table 2 shows, between 1980 and 1998, the proportion of male employees who worked, on average, less than 35 hours or more than 40 hours a week increased significantly, while the proportion who worked a more "normal" 35 to 40 hours a week decreased significantly. Similarly, the proportion of females who worked fewer than 35 hours or more than 40 hours a week also increased substantially. Moreover, 18 percent of employees worked either paid or unpaid overtime in a given week in 1998 (Hall 1999, 34).

For the significant number of individuals who are working longer hours in full-time jobs, the extension of the workweek, all else being equal, might operate to increase work-life conflict. The workweek might lengthen because, for example, the employer is under competitive pressure to maintain low labour costs and is reluctant to hire more workers, or because payroll taxes discourage the hiring of additional employees when it is more cost effective to make longer use of the existing labour force. Technological changes have also facilitated the use of smaller workforces while maintaining or increasing output levels.

The significant increase in the prevalence of employees who work a shorter week is also substantially a function of employer preferences for nonstandard work arrangements, even if many firms develop such arrangements in order to accommodate workers who prefer the flexible hours associated with such jobs.<sup>11</sup> But the shift toward nonstandard arrangements also suggests that many employees in

Table 1  
Share of Total Employment, by Sex and Work Arrangement, Canada, 1989 and 2002 (percent)

	Employment category	1989	2002	Change 1989-2002
Full-time	Total permanent	67	63	-4
	Male permanent	71	66	-5
	Female permanent	63	59	-4
	Total temporary	4	7	+3
	Male temporary	4	7	+3
	Female temporary	3	6	+3
Part-time	Total permanent	11	11	0
	Male permanent	5	5	0
	Female permanent	19	17	-2
	Total temporary	3	4	+1
	Male temporary	2	3	+1
	Female temporary	4	6	+2

Source: L. Vosko, N. Zukewich, and C. Cranford, "Precarious Jobs: A New Typology of Employment," *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, vol. 4, October 2003 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, cat. no. 71-001), p. 20.

such jobs would prefer longer hours but cannot get them. I consider this issue of hours constraints further in the following section.

### Changes in the size distribution of firms

One of the most prominent structural changes that have taken place in the economy is the growth in employment in smaller firms, particularly manufacturing firms with fewer than 50 employees (see table 3).<sup>12</sup> Several factors underlie this trend. One factor is sectoral shifts in economic activity, particularly in favour of services; another is the reduction in the size of permanent core workforces and the increased reliance on nonstandard employment and contracting out. Core workforce sizes have declined partly because of labour-saving technological advances in production systems and partly because of changes in organizational structures and work systems.

In the following section, I turn to the implications of these developments, in the context of supply and demand in the labour market, for work-life balance issues, with a focus on the constraints that affect workers' ability to achieve balance.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Employees, by Number of Hours Worked, Canada, 1980 and 1998 (percent)**

Hours	1980		1998	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Short (0-34)	25.5	45.1	27.9	49.6
Standard (35-40)	50.9	46.8	43.3	38.8
Long (41 and over)	23.7	8.1	28.8	11.6

Source: Karen Hall, "Hours Polarization at the End of the 1990s," *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, summer 1999 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, cat. no. 71-001). Note: Self-employed workers are excluded.

**Table 3**  
**Net Job Change Rate and Employment Distribution, by Firm Size, Canada, 1978-92 (percent)**

Firm size	Net job change rate	Employment distribution
0-19	5.1	23.7
20-49	4.5	10.9
50-99	3.8	7.9
100-499	2.3	15.9
500 and over	0.6	41.6

Source: G. Picot and R. Dupuy, "Job Creation by Company Size Class: Concentration and Persistence of Job Gains and Losses in Canadian Companies," Research Paper 93 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Business and Labour Market Analysis Division, April 1996), table 1.

Note: The employment distribution is measured as the percentage of "average annual employment counts" in each category of firm size. Employment is measured as an "average annual employment count," which includes both full- and part-time employees. The measure of employment is based on the long-run average firm size.

### Work Hours, Constraints on Choice and the Life Cycle

There is considerable international empirical evidence for the extent of work-family conflict, but the largest and most cohesive body of Canadian evidence emanates from a series of studies by Duxbury, Higgins and colleagues.<sup>13</sup> Their research is based on two separate surveys of workers conducted in 1991 and 2001. In a review of the studies, Duxbury and Higgins conclude:

All three aspects of work-life conflict – role overload, work to family and family to work interference – have increased, and no demographic group appears to have been left unscathed (2001, vi).

One of the drawbacks of this research, however, is that its survey samples are based on large firms (500 or more employees) and public-sector organizations, whereas, as we have seen, the structure of the economy has shifted considerably in favour of smaller firms, and the proportion of employment accounted for by larger firms has declined. In addition, in the 2001 sample, only 20 percent of respondents were employed in the private sector. This combination of characteristics suggests that extrapolating the results to the broader private sector may be problematic.<sup>14</sup> The research is thus essentially inductive, based on the survey results of individual perceptions of conflict.

Still, it is often argued that work-life conflict matters, as a policy issue, because there is evidence that it is associated with negative outcomes for employees, firms and society. Duxbury and Higgins (2003, x) identify a range of possible outcomes arising from work-life conflict occurring at the individual level (such as stress, satisfaction and health), the family level (family satisfaction), the organizational level (satisfaction, stress, turnover or absenteeism) and the social level (health). The economic costs associated with work-life conflict could be significant for both individuals and the broader economy and could also have implications for social expenditures. For example, work-life conflict might lead to higher rates of illness or absenteeism, which increases costs and lowers productivity; increased stress-related illness could increase the financial burden on the health care system (see, for example, Duxbury, Higgins and Johnson 1999, Duxbury and Higgins 2001; and Higgins, Duxbury and Johnson 2004). Indeed, these social and economic issues have dominated much of the analysis of and discourse on work-life balance issues.

Yet attributing a correlation between work-life conflict and these outcomes may be problematic. A conservative conclusion is that costs to employers and the economy arise from work-life conflict, but currently available data identifying and quantifying such costs appear inadequate, as the example of absenteeism illustrates. In 2002, the length of time lost due to personal illness or personal or family reasons in Canada was about nine days per full-time worker, of which only about two days were attributable to personal or family responsibilities. However, the incidence and length of absences due to such responsibilities increased only slightly over the 1999-2003 period (Statistics Canada 2003b, 11).<sup>15</sup> Any increase in conflict arising from such a modest increase in absence for personal or family reasons is not readily measurable.

Complicating research on this issue is the fact that many of the negative workplace and health outcomes arising from work-life conflict (such as stress, ill health and absenteeism) are also associated with other workplace and home life factors, making clear tests of the independent effects of work-life conflict problematic. Research on costing of these outcomes is also in the early stages.

These considerations suggest that basic data collection ought to be a fundamental priority, in order to support research on the costs associated with work-life conflict. More research on the specific factors that give rise to work-life conflict and the resultant costs incurred by organizations, social programs and society more generally would be highly beneficial for both firms and governments.

Several key issues arise. One concerns the extent to which individuals' allocation of time varies according to the key personal characteristics of sex and age. Another issue is the extent to which constraints exist on individuals' choices of time allocation, especially on their preferred hours of work.<sup>16</sup> Individuals' preferences for hours of work, their home work demands and the constraints they confront are all expected to vary over the course of their life cycle. All of these issues flow into work-life conflict and raise challenges to policy-making in this area.

### Time allocation and stress: Sex and age dimensions

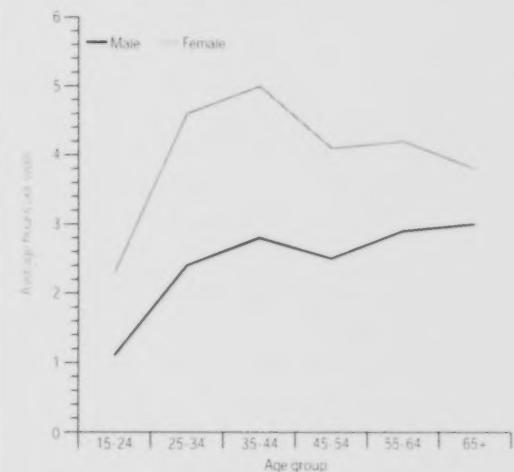
Most individuals divide their time among household activities, leisure and work in the labour market. From an economic viewpoint, individuals are assumed to allocate their time among these various

uses so as to maximize their well-being, which may be interdependent with others in the household. Most home activities involve the production of some output, such as food preparation, cleaning, repairs or some form of care for others – all parents know that care for children is particularly time intensive, while an aging population means increasing care for elderly family members until institutionalization becomes necessary.

Canadian data show that the allocation of time to these various activities varies according to sex and age. Within the overall population (those at home and at work) ages 15 and older, both males and females allocate a similar amount of time to all work, both paid and unpaid, but females spend, on average, roughly one and a half as much time on unpaid work activity, including household and civic/voluntary and related activities (Clark 2001, 4-5; see also Statistics Canada 1999). This pattern of time use is consistent with a division of unpaid work that falls disproportionately on women regardless of their paid-employment status, but the magnitude of the gap is not large and has been decreasing over time.

Females still tend to spend, on average, about twice as much time on household work as men do (two to five hours versus one to three hours, depending on age). There is also a significant life-cycle dimension to the allocation of time (see figure 6). Females consistently devote more time to household work at every age, but the difference is largest in the

Figure 6  
Average Time Devoted to Household Work, by Age Group and Sex, Canada, 1998



Source: Statistics Canada. *Overview of the Time Use of Canadians in 1998* (Ottawa, 1999, cat. no. 12F0080XIE), table 2.

prime age years of 25 to 54 and smallest among the youngest and oldest age groups. This life-cycle pattern might partly reflect women's greater allocation of time to the care of children and the elderly.

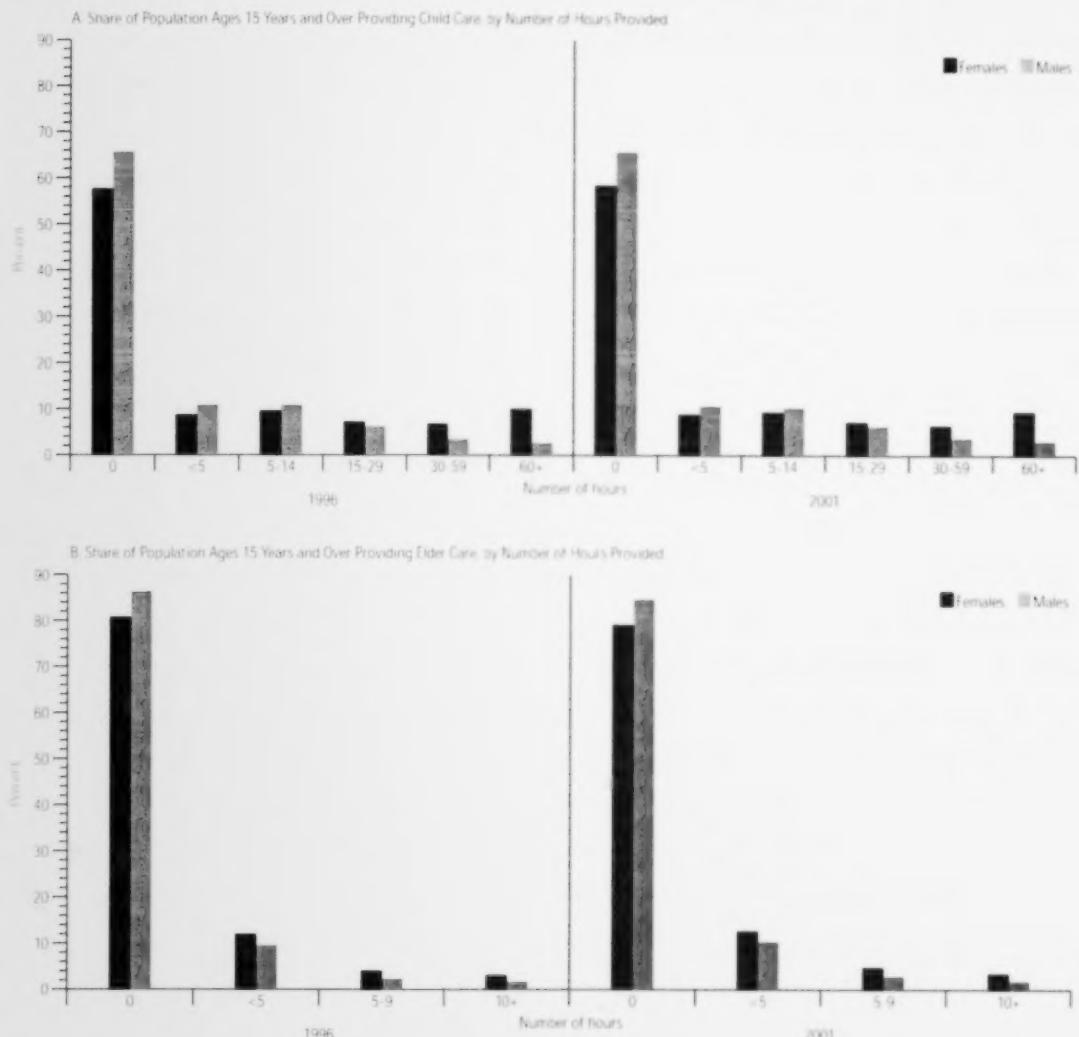
In terms of child care, slightly more males than females provide 14 or fewer hours a week, while slightly more females than males provide 15 or more hours a week, and more females provide elder care at all amounts of time (see panels A and B of figure 7). The differences between males and females are not large, but they illustrate that women shoulder greater responsibility for child and elder care.<sup>17</sup>

Average days lost per worker because of personal or family responsibilities also vary by sex, even in the

absence of children, although the male-female differences are quite small overall. Time lost for family or personal reasons also has a life-cycle dimension: the average number of days lost per worker with children declines steadily as the children's ages increase, and the average number of days lost is generally highest in the prime working years of 25 to 44 (see figure 8, panels A and B).

For women who have a substantial attachment to the labour market, this level of household work and care responsibilities is often described as a "double burden" that is expected to give rise to high stress. Although the gap is slowly eroding, the persistence of this double work burden suggests that an underlying factor affecting work-life conflict for women engaged in

**Figure 7**  
Provision of Unpaid Child and Elder Care, by Sex, Canada, 1996 and 2001 (percent)

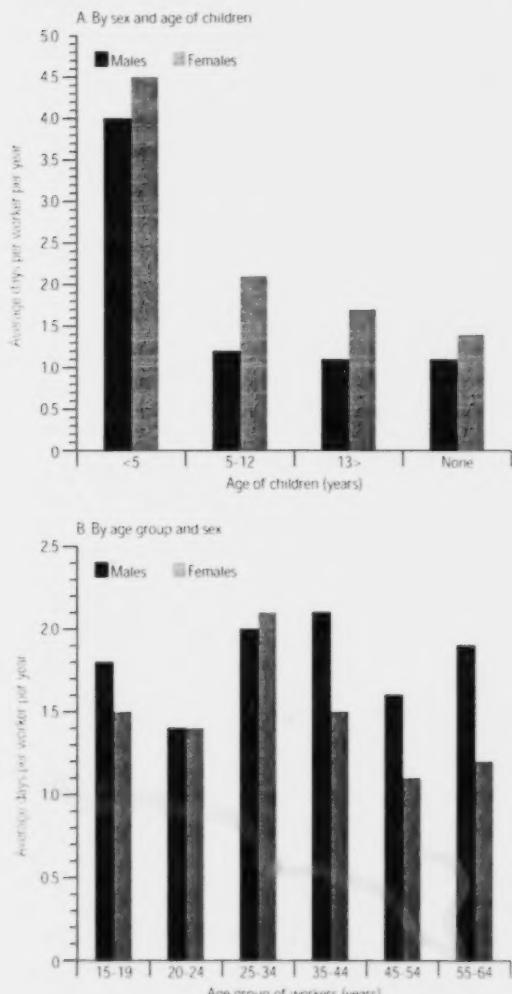


Source: Statistics Canada, *The Changing Profile of Canada's Labour Force, 2001 Census, Analysis Series* (Ottawa, 2003, cat. no. 96F0030XIE2001009), p. 37.

market and home work is a *social constraint* imposed by the socialization of women to perform time-intensive care activities. The increased flexibility associated with nonstandard work arrangements may be one factor influencing women in their choice of part-time employment and self-employment.

Conflict arising from constraints on one's ability to balance the time demands of work and family is, however, only one among many ways in which stress arises. In the workplace, job stress can result from such factors as too many demands given the hours available, unfavourable interpersonal relations among co-workers, job insecurity, the risk of an accident or

**Figure 8**  
Days Lost Because of Personal or Family Responsibilities, Canada, 2003



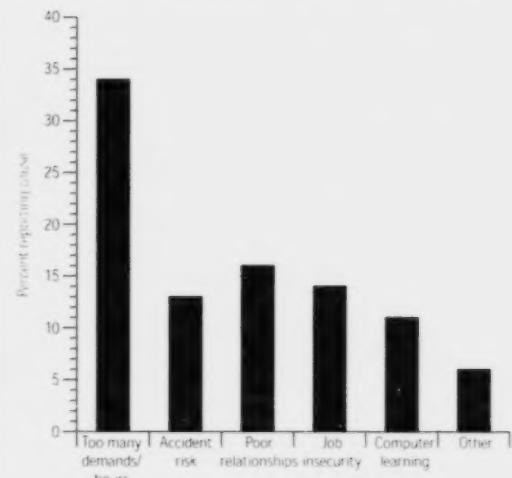
Source: Statistics Canada, *Work Absence Rates, 2003* (Ottawa, 2004, cat. no. 71-211-XIE), tables 1-1, 1-3.

Note: Figures exclude days taken for maternity leave.

change arising from new technology (see figure 9). Moreover, these sources of stress might be cumulative.

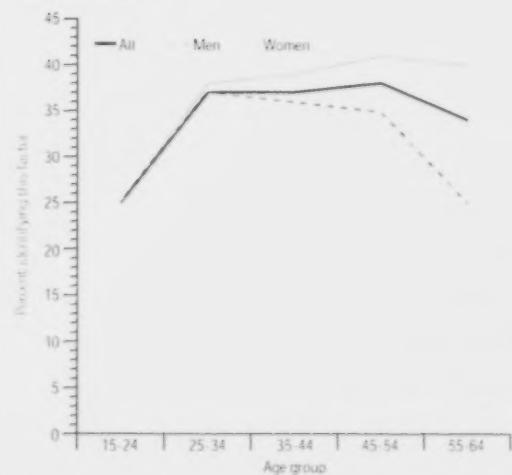
The most commonly cited source of stress, reported by nearly 35 percent of respondents, arises from having to cope with too many demands in the available time. Moreover, as with the distribution of household work, there is a life-cycle dimension to such stress. As figure 10 shows, the proportion of those working who report stress of this kind is low in the youngest age

**Figure 9**  
Sources of Reported Workplace Stress, Canada, 2000



Source: G. Williams, "Sources of Workplace Stress," *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, vol. 4, June 2003 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, cat. no. 71-001), table 3, p. 10.

**Figure 10**  
Too Many Demands on Available Hours Reported as a Source of Workplace Stress, by Age Group and Sex, Canada, 2000



Source: C. Williams, "Sources of Workplace Stress," *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, vol. 4, June 2003 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, cat. no. 71-001), table 3, p. 10.

group and highest in the middle prime age groups, and about the same for both males and females until the age 45 and older group, when increasingly more females than males report such stress. Among those ages 55 to 64, 40 percent of females but only 25 percent of males report this source of stress. These results suggest that stress related to demands on time has a sex element that matters both at a point in time and in relation to a life-cycle dimension of demands on time (see Becker 1985).

The incidence and extent of the work-life conflict individuals experience appears, therefore, to depend on an array of personal and institutional characteristics. In an analysis of the determinants of workplace stress, Williams (2003, 11) suggests that some of the same factors can explain differences in the likelihood of feeling stress in different workplace conditions. For example, in considering stress arising from too many demands or hours and stress from the risk of an accident or injury, Williams finds that part-time workers are less likely than full-time workers, men less likely than females and younger workers less likely than older workers to experience either kind of stress; that shift work is associated with both types of stress; and that stress from either source varies across occupational groups. Interestingly, Williams finds that having children ages 14 and under at home is not a significant stress trigger in the workplace.

Are greater stress levels reported by those who must look after both children and the elderly? Common sense might lead one to think so, but the data are not that clear-cut. As Williams (2004, 6-10) reports, according to one survey, approximately 10 percent of those ages 45 to 64 both have children at home and are responsible for elder care; of these, just over 80 percent are employed. Looking after the elderly is also an activity that more women do than men (32 percent versus roughly 25 percent). Whether or not they also provide both child and elder care, more women than men tend to provide in-home and personal care, while more men than women provide outside chores and assistance with transportation. At the same time, 64 percent of employed persons who provide elder care and 70 percent of those who provide both child and elder care complain of high levels of stress.

Thus, some "sandwiched" workers would probably benefit from greater flexibility in work schedules and better support through workplace and government programs. Yet, as Williams reports, there is also some evidence that take-up rates on elder care services are quite low. Moreover, despite high stress levels, more

than 80 percent of "sandwiched" workers also say they are satisfied with the state of their work-family balance. The factors accounting for this positive reporting on work-life balance in the face of high levels of work and family responsibilities are not yet well understood – it is a quandary that still needs to be explained.

### Hours preferences and constraints on individual time allocation

The number of hours an individual prefers to allocate to paid work and home work is a function of the individual's desire to participate in the labour market, dependency on the labour market for income – which might, in turn, depend on the extent of the social welfare system – and need to engage in home production. The allocation of hours is also a function of various social and cultural characteristics that affect preferences and institutional arrangements that facilitate alternative work arrangements (see Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2003, 305-7). In Canada, these factors are expected to vary geographically and between urban and rural regions as well.

Numerous employment and personal characteristics influence an individual's preference for working hours, including income level, employment status, marital status, number of children, age and education (see Drolet and Morissette 1997a,b; Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2003, 310). Profiles of hours preferences by characteristic are highly varied and complicated, because the relationship between the effects of these characteristics and preferences for market work hours is not necessarily either reinforcing or of similar magnitude.<sup>18</sup>

In general, there is an underlying distribution of preferences for hours of work across individuals in the working-age population, and the distribution varies across characteristics. Figure 11 illustrates a possible

Figure 11  
Distributions of Workers' Preferences for More or Fewer Hours



Source: Author

distribution of the preferred number of hours of work among regular full-time and part-time workers. For both groups of workers, the observed average preference is no change to the number of hours they work, although the majority of workers with shorter regular hours would prefer more hours and the majority with longer regular hours would prefer fewer hours. Since the two distributions of workers are quite different, aiming policy at the average preference would stand to miss the needs of a majority of workers.

These complexities notwithstanding, changes in the characteristics of the population are relevant to understanding changes in work-life conflict. In particular, both the aging population and the increasing diversity of family structures have the potential to create work-life conflict. If at all possible, policy, whether private or public, must account for variations among individuals and for a diversity of characteristics and circumstances.

Although most workers appear satisfied with the hours they work, evidence suggests that, over time, roughly one-third to one-half of them would prefer different hours of work. Kahn and Lang (1995) find that, in 1985, roughly one-half of Canadian workers were satisfied with their hours of work, and that about 17 percent desired fewer hours while about 35 percent preferred more hours. Similarly, using data for 1995, Drolet and Morissette (1997a,b) find that two-thirds of workers surveyed were satisfied with their current hours, roughly 27 percent desired longer hours and only about 6 percent preferred fewer hours of work.

This desire to allocate more or less time to market work than is currently provided suggests the presence of binding *hours constraints*. Moreover, the somewhat consistent nature of the evidence over time of a desire to reallocate hours suggests that hours constraints are persistent as well.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, despite evidence that there are too many demands on workers' time, there is also consistent survey evidence that a large proportion of workers would prefer more work hours, for more pay. In other words, these workers, on the margin, appear to value the greater income more than the loss of hours of nonmarket time spent at home work or leisure.

Several models in the economics literature could explain the presence of hours constraints in terms of contracting arrangements, but in one of the few studies to make use of Canadian data, Kahn and Lang (1995) find limited support for only one – the specific human capital model.<sup>20</sup> Of course, other factors, such as institutional constraints arising from production process requirements, management preferences,

union work rules, the impact of government labour standards or payroll taxes, could also play roles independent of worker-firm contracting arrangements (see Kahn and Lang 1992, 673). In the absence of clear theoretical guidance, what, then, accounts for the desire of a significant proportion of the working population to increase hours of work?

Many of those who prefer longer hours of work for more money are expected to be nonstandard workers, especially those who are employed for fewer than 30 hours per week – mainly the 17.2 percent of the labour force that is part-time (Statistics Canada 2005, 29). For the roughly one-quarter of part-time workers who are involuntarily employed part-time (Statistics Canada 2004a, 54), the hours constraint is a function of *demand-side* considerations concerning firms' employment arrangements, which in turn are a result of firms' decisions about the optimal mix of core and peripheral (nonstandard) workers.

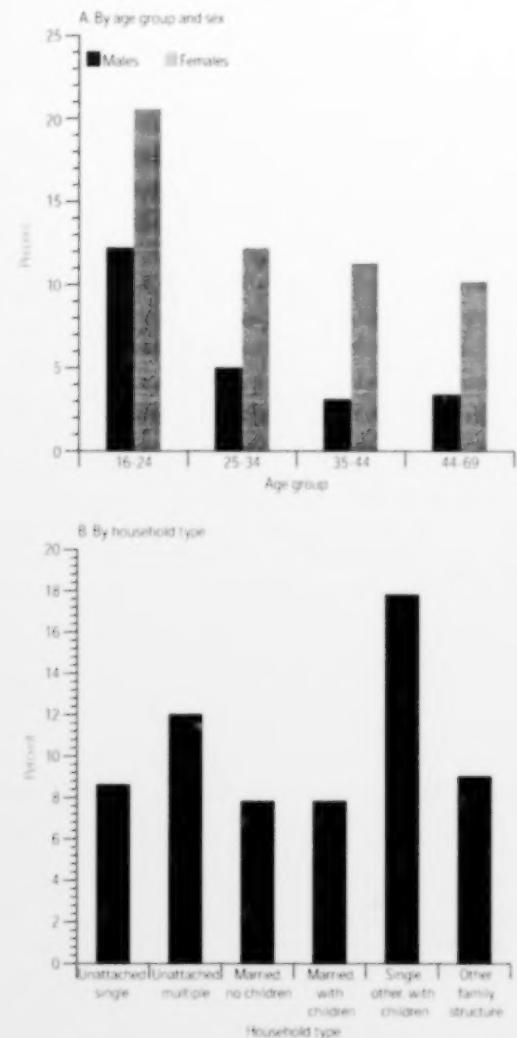
The rate of involuntary part-time employment varies by personal characteristics, including age, sex and family structure, as figure 12 shows.<sup>21</sup> The rate is higher for youths than for older people and declines with age (up to the older ages), is noticeably higher for females than for males and is significantly higher for single people with children. In the latter case, the single parent may confront an hours constraint combined with other home work and responsibility constraints related to child care, arising, perhaps, because of the unavailability or unaffordability of daycare.

Voluntary part-time workers, on the other hand, choose part-time work because they prefer shorter hours of work. The propensity to work part-time strictly as a *preference* increases by age for both males and females; preference for part-time work because of *schooling* decreases significantly with age; and working part-time because of *illness or disability* is negligible among the youngest workers, highest for middle-aged workers and lower in the older age groups (Marshall 2001, 22, 24).

Working part-time for family-related reasons is highest, for both males and females, in the 25 to 54 age group. Voluntary part-time workers may benefit from more flexible work hours to accommodate home work requirements, such as child care. They may also choose part-time work because of constraints on their ability to afford daycare or to schedule daycare hours that accommodate standard full-time jobs.<sup>22</sup> These constraints raise an important issue regarding the extent to which choosing part-time work is really "voluntary." Alternatively, the issue may be viewed as one of the degree to which choices about work arrangements are constrained.

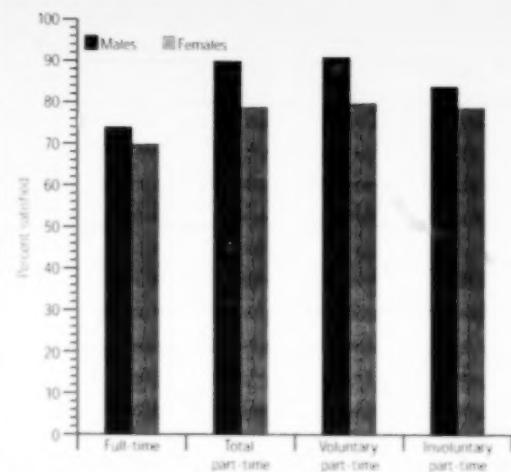
Whether part-time workers – either voluntary or involuntary – face significant work-life conflict seems to depend on their personal circumstances and characteristics, such as age or family structure. As figure 13 shows, a higher proportion of males, whether full- or part-time workers, tend to report being satisfied with work-life balance; this result is consistent with the double burden that women confront, although one would need to attribute cause and effect with caution. Relative to full-time workers, a larger proportion of part-time workers – whether voluntary or not – report being satisfied with work-life balance. This, too, is consistent with expectations, since part-time workers

Figure 12  
Involuntary Part-Time Employment, Canada, 1996



Source: N. Noreau, *Longitudinal Aspect of Involuntary Part-time Employment* (Ottawa, April 2000, cat. no. 75F002MIE-00003), tables 2, 3.  
Note: Part-time rate is calculated relative to total employment.

Figure 13  
Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance, by Sex and Employment Status, Canada, 1998



Source: K. Marshall, "Part-Time by Choice," *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, vol. 4, spring 2001 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, cat. no. 71-001), p. 24.

should benefit from lower demands on time in balancing work and home responsibilities.

Some individuals face constraints on how flexible they can be in allocating hours. Some may seek to reduce their daily or weekly hours but are unable to do so because the job is a regular, full-time position. Others may be unable to create a sufficiently flexible work schedule within a daily or weekly time frame, regardless of whether their employment arrangements are full-time or nonstandard. These types of problems can be exacerbated in organizations in which the full-time core workforce is lean and the use of temporary replacements or the shifting of work to other employees is not feasible.

Nevertheless, although some workers in every type of work arrangement report dissatisfaction with the state of their work-life balance, overall just over 70 percent of full-time and more than 80 percent of part-time workers report being satisfied with their allocation of hours between work and life – that is, work-life *balance*, not conflict, is predominant.

## Work-Life Balance in the Context of Labour Policy

Though circumscribed, work-life conflict still concerns a significant minority of workers and thus represents an important issue for Canada in social as well as in economic terms.

In social terms, work-life conflict affects the quality of work and home life and raises the problem of equity between men and women. For employers, it can lead to less-than-ideal matching of worker and firm, poor recruitment and unwanted turnover. It also raises issues about the flexibility of firms' employment norms, work arrangements and human resources practices. Work-life conflict also creates challenges for government in terms of the coverage and design of relevant social programs, such as child care and elder care. In most workplaces, family-friendly work arrangements and services remain limited – only 2 to 7 percent of workers have child or elder care services available to them at the workplace (Comfort, Johnson and Wallace 2003, 50) – and access to them varies considerably by sex, firm size and type of employment.

### **The importance of firm size**

Employees' access to and participation in family-friendly work arrangements and child and elder care at the workplace varies by firm size (see Comfort, Johnson and Wallace 2003, table 2.4; Marshall 2003). For example, the larger the firm, the smaller is the proportion of employees with access to flexible work schedules, or flextime. One plausible explanation for this finding is that smaller firms typically tend to operate with a less formal and hierarchical management style, which might lend itself to a range of informal work arrangements. In contrast, the larger the firm, the larger is the proportion of employees with access to child care or elder care services. This finding is not surprising, since larger firms are more likely to provide such benefits.

Thus, although smaller firms are increasingly prevalent in the economy, relatively fewer of their workers than in larger firms have access to family-friendly care services, while relatively more have flexible work arrangements. Yet work-life policies, like many other labour policies, are more difficult to target and enforce in small workplaces.<sup>23</sup> It may also be harder to create incentives to private action in small workplaces, although this is an area of policy research that requires further attention. One observation is that, as employment shifts in favour of smaller firms that are less able to assist in providing child and elder care services, pressure could increase for government to play some role in ensuring that employees in smaller firms have access to these services.

Given the difficulty of designing policies aimed at small workplaces, careful consideration should be

given to alternative policy designs. Should work-life conflict policies involve government-mandated programs or the creation of incentives for employers to provide family-friendly arrangements and services? Should policies be aimed at workplaces, the traditional target of most labour policies, or at the individual?

One approach that might help to reduce work-life conflict is to provide employees with a certain number of workdays designated for use in providing care or to meet family demands. These days could be viewed as a benefit and accumulated over time or "banked," to be drawn on as needed and carried forward from year to year. In addition, vesting access to such care or family days in workers – as a labour force participation benefit rather than one provided at the discretion of employers – would allow workers to carry days from one employer to another. The benefit could also be pro-rated according to the number of hours the worker has supplied to the labour market.

### **The importance of good worker-firm matching**

Another dimension of the search for work-life balance relates to the ability to engage successfully in matching worker and firm.<sup>24</sup> A good match requires that both the worker and the firm gain from the employment relationship. From the worker's perspective, wages and working conditions, including the hours of work, degree of work flexibility and other benefits such as child or elder care services, may all matter in assessing the match quality. There is some, albeit limited, evidence that a degree of worker-job matching is based on preferences for hours of work (see Kahn and Lang 1995).

Government may well have a role to play here. Policies such as improving worker mobility across employers or increasing the available information about family-friendly practices in organizations should make it easier for workers to choose the firm that best matches their work-life preferences. For their part, employers who wish to improve recruitment and retention should be more aware of the importance of various benefits and work arrangements to prospective and current employees.

### **Employment arrangement, sex and family dimensions**

Employees' access to and participation in family-friendly work arrangements varies considerably by employment arrangement as well as by sex and family characteristics. To the extent that the issue of

work-life balance has a gender component, policies that address work-life conflict should also have an explicit equity aspect to them.

In general, several broad patterns relevant to work-life conflict emerge when one compares full- and part-time employees by sex and family characteristics. For example, nonstandard workers generally have less access than full-time workers to child and elder care services, as well as other employment benefits, offered through the workplace. Moreover, a smaller proportion of females (whether full- or part-time) than males have access to such services (see table 4). These different dimensions call for policies that are flexible and possibly targeted toward individuals in order to address their particular circumstances.

### The life-cycle dimension

Adopting a "life course" as opposed to a "family" perspective on work-life balance issues has important implications for government, firms and individuals. The factors contributing to work-life conflict, and the extent of work-life conflict, change over the course of the life cycle. For example, youths may require flexibility in order to attend school, workers may have child care demands at home in their early to mid-career period, and they may have elder care or both child and elder care demands in their later working years. As workers progress through their careers, job mobility patterns and employment arrangements vary.

Policies that target workers' needs at a particular point in time are likely to fail to cover some workers at other points in the life cycle, as the factors that affect their work-life conflict change. This suggests that policies need to be flexible over time in order to meet the changing demands of individual workers. Policies should also be able to adjust to changes in underlying factors that affect work-life conflict, such

as changing demographics or patterns of work or employment arrangements.

### The importance of constraints

Constraints matter. Some persist over time and appear to be both considerable and fairly binding, and include social constraints, hours constraints, and workplace flexibility constraints.

Despite improvements over the course of the past few decades, the male-female dimension of time-allocation decisions and the incidence and intensity of time devoted to work at home (especially child and elder care) over the life cycle remains significant. The persistence of such differences points to important social constraints on the ability of women to deal with professional and family responsibilities.

There is also substantial evidence that a large segment of the workforce faces hours constraints in the market.<sup>25</sup> For workers who desire fewer hours, who face a very long workweek or considerable overtime, especially unpaid overtime, policy responses may be useful if the individuals can be identified and accessed. A significant minority of workers, though, actually prefer to work longer hours, and this significant demand for greater hours appears to have persisted over time. It also seems to run counter to the observation that work-life conflict has increased. The hours constraints that people face appear to be driven to a large extent by the bifurcation in employment arrangements between full-time and contingent jobs. Yet, although nonstandard workers are most likely to face constraints in the direction of unmet demand for more hours, most workers are satisfied with their work-life balance.

The desire for more hours could also be driven by a desire for greater income. The key issue is the extent to which individuals seek greater income to increase personal consumption or personal time devoted to leisure or, conversely, to purchase goods and services to substitute for their own time in home production – possibly in order to ease time constraints and reduce work-life conflict. Duxbury and Higgins (2001), for example, find that the budget constraint is often a binding one that can aggravate work-life conflict.<sup>26</sup> This raises the question of the extent to which those workers who experience increased work-life conflict nevertheless desire more hours of work and why. It also raises the issue of what role there is for public policy in facilitating, as examples, the provision of affordable child and elder care or some form of income support program.

Constraints on work flexibility also seem to exist and, for those individuals experiencing them, are likely

Table 4  
Employees' Access to Family-Friendly Work Arrangements, by Sex, Canada, 1998-99 (percent)

Work arrangement	Females		Males	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Flextime	43.7	40.8	43.6	42.4
Telework	4.8	5.5	5.5	3.0
Child care	6.1	4.6	6.6	5.3
Elder care	3.5	2.1	4.1	2.7

Source: D. Comfort, K. Johnson, and D. Wallace, *Part-Time Work and Family-Friendly Practices in Canadian Workplaces: The Evolving Workplace Series 6*, cat. no. 71684-MIE (Ottawa: Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, 2003), p. 50.

to have a substantial impact on workers with significant family responsibilities. Inflexibility in work scheduling clearly emanates from the firm side. Encouraging firms to identify potential ways of increasing work flexibility and to provide opportunities for workers who prefer them to use flexible work arrangements is another possible avenue for policy action.<sup>27</sup> Since public policy already attempts to facilitate "best practices" in other areas of human resource management, the main role for policy here is to facilitate "best work-life balance practices" in firms.

## Conclusion

The common approach to considering work-life balance issues emphasizes the costs of work-life conflict to individuals, employers, government or society. Implicit in analyses of these issues is that these costs arise fundamentally because employees are unable to make optimal choices in allocating their time between work and family, and that these constraints are both binding and getting tighter.

Recent decades have seen shifts in the level and types of demands placed on workers' time even as some continue to face income constraints. As a result, for some workers, the ability to allocate time in a manner more aligned with their needs or preferences is limited, leading to an imbalance between the demands on their time and the time available. The first-order effect is increased worker stress. Isolating the independent factors affecting work-family conflict, or the effect of work-life conflict on stress, is difficult because the factors that create conflict may be interdependent and highly correlated. On the other hand, so too are the factors that create a variety of stresses. Alternatively, this makes it critical to identify those workers who tend to experience the greatest conflict in order to target policy successfully.

These considerations give rise to several key issues and some stylized observations. The key question is whether government and business should be more policy active. Researchers have proposed a wide range of private and public actions and policies, but specific policies would likely benefit from a careful cost-benefit analysis. There is some evidence that the cost of work-life conflict for individuals, firms and society is sufficiently high to warrant action by private and public stakeholders. Yet the evidence on the effects of work-life conflict remains limited, and

more research on this point would support the type of evidence-based policy analysis required on this issue. Several policy-relevant issues are worth emphasizing and elaborating on here.

First, although analysts have made strides in assessing the costs of work-life conflict, a rigorous assessment of the costs over time should be undertaken. The challenge of such an analysis is that many of the more readily identifiable and directly measurable costs – such as stress-related health problems or absenteeism – are the result of multiple factors, only one of which is work-life conflict. Another issue is that direct benefits include improved workplace and home satisfaction or job effort, which are inherently difficult to measure. Any independent effects on positive workplace productivity are also likely to be difficult to isolate and measure.

Second, some proposals for policy action appear, even on the face of it, to entail considerable direct and indirect costs. For example, the proposal for a comprehensive elder care program, like the plan to introduce a national child care program, would require major government expenditure, while current proposals for a child care program are very broad in scope. In the private sphere, where rates at which employees take advantage of available programs are low, many firms may have already conducted an informal cost-benefit analysis of these issues, at least implicitly. Competitive pressures have motivated firms to reduce labour costs and adopt strategies to increase productivity. One example of this strategy is the movement toward maintaining a core workforce, with the flexibility to increase hours through overtime, combined with a peripheral workforce of non-standard workers. New production technologies facilitate this dual workforce configuration while increasing productivity. Regular full-time workers are well paid and trained, but lean in number and heavily used when necessary, while nonstandard workers are used to obtain flexibility at low cost. Many firms, moreover, may already have made most of the adjustments to employee benefits and work arrangements that they believe are required by employee demand and productivity considerations, and will evaluate programs that add to labour costs or reduce flexibility against the productivity gains they provide. Any marginal changes in management practices firms now make may offer only small opportunities to reduce work-life conflict.

Third, work-life conflict has an equity and social values dimension. The value of a particular

work-life policy action may be acknowledged on pure equity grounds. But the policy should attempt to enhance the desired equity outcome while minimizing the extent to which it functions against market forces. The conventional wisdom is that such a policy can be justified only by a well-identified market failure or inequity (see Chaykowski and Gunderson 2001). If work-life conflicts impose considerable costs on firms (through, say, lost productivity) and on society (through increased health costs, for example), then policies with an equity rationale may be congruent with an economic rationale. This highlights the importance of evaluating the economic efficacy of work-life balance policies, taking into account a careful cost-benefit analysis of proposed policies.

Fourth, there needs to be a careful evaluation of the appropriate mix of public policy, private policy and individual adjustments.<sup>10</sup> However, policies also need to be carefully targeted if they are to resolve specific work-life conflicts without creating unintended consequences. The range of demands on an individual's time give rise to multiple sources of work-life conflict. This suggests a possible role for policies that operate to address different sources of conflict. Approaches to addressing work-life conflict could include some combination of policies that create incentives for private action by individuals or firms, requirements for action by firms and government policies that attempt to address broader sources of work-life conflict that clearly have a public cost aspect to them.

A variety of evidence suggests that work-life conflict is a significant issue for some segments of the labour force, but the available Canadian evidence on the extent of the conflict is limited. Even more limited is the evidence on the costs such conflict imposes. Yet public attention to this issue is increasing, for several reasons. The aging of both the workforce and the population at large is expected to increase demands on individuals to provide elder care. Possible labour shortages could induce employers to design measures, such as work-life benefits, to attract and keep valuable staff. At the same time, the feminization of the professions is expected to continue, which will make work-life conflict a significant issue for females unless there is a substantial change in the current imbalance between males and females in family and care responsibilities.

Four key conclusions emerge from this paper. First, we need further research to assess the extent

and costs of work-life conflict, especially in the private sector. Second, we need further evaluation of the cost-benefit of policy alternatives. Third, we need to assess carefully the segment of the workforce that experiences work-life conflict in order to design policies in a targeted fashion. Finally, we need to consider how to develop a consistent set of private and public policies within a broader policy framework for work-life balance.

## Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges the benefit of helpful comments from Sarah Fortin, France St-Hilaire and anonymous reviewers.

- 1 Stier and Lewin-Epstein (2003, 303-5) frame the issue of differences across workers in hours of work explicitly as the result of a combination of supply- and demand-side considerations.
- 2 For example, all else being equal, an increased "culture of consumption" could result in a greater supply of hours (see Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2003, 304 and the references therein), while a shift toward attaching greater value to household production (in the form of, for example, child or elder care) could result in a smaller supply of hours.
- 3 On the negative effect of payroll taxes on employment, see Archambault and Hostland (1996) and Abbott and Beach (1997).
- 4 For a long-run perspective on the political economy dimensions of this transformation, see Yergin and Stanislaw (1998). Generally, the main internal factors include changes in the demographics of the population and labour force, in immigration and in the degree of regulation of markets; externally, technological advances have changed the basis of economic activity, altered transportation methods, and transformed production systems and the structure of organizations and work, while economic globalization has broadened markets and increased the degree of competition.
- 5 On economic globalization and competition, see Ohmae (1990), Reich (1992), Thurow (1992). On technology and economic transformation, see Lipsey (1993). On the transformation of production systems and of work and the factors shaping it, see Appelbaum and Batt (1994), Cappelli et al (1997); Appelbaum et al (2000); Katz and Darbshire (2000). On globalization and labour markets, see Chaykowski and Gunderson (2001). On globalization and employment relations and work systems, see Belanger, Edwards and Haiven (1994); Katz and Darbshire (2000). On the Canadian workplace, see Betcherman et al (1994). On demographic change and its implications, see Foot and Stoffman (1996). On Canadian immigration and immigration policy, see Beach, Green and Reitz (2003). On government restructuring in Canada, see Roberts (2001). On the effects of deregulation on industrial relations in selected Canadian industries, see Chaykowski and Verma (1992).
- 6 The median age of Canada's population increased from 36.5 in 1981 to 41.3 in 2001 and is projected to rise to 43.7 in 2011; see Statistics Canada (2001c, 28).
- 7 As another reflection of women's double burden, increasing female participation in the paid labour market may be explained in part by the need to purchase labour-saving goods and services for home production. As examples, consider dishwashers, cleaning services or child and elder care services. On the new home economics, see Ferber and Birnbaum (1977); Becker (1981); a review of the theory of home production is provided by Gronau (1997).
- 8 For US and international evidence of these changes, see Appelbaum and Batt (1994); Cappelli et al. (1997); Katz and Darbshire (2000); and Murray et al. (2002). For Canadian evidence, see Betcherman et al. (1994); Verma and Chaykowski (1999); and Chaykowski (2004), and references therein.
- 9 In fact, not all jobs that are peripheral to an organization have all of these characteristics; for example, a contract or term worker may earn a high wage, but have few benefits and no long-term attachment. Alternatively, some part-time workers may be relatively permanent, thereby enjoying job stability and possibly high wages, but limited training opportunities or benefits.
- 10 In 2003, women accounted for about 69 percent of all part-time employment (Statistics Canada 2004b).
- 11 In 1999, only about one-quarter of employees who worked part-time did so involuntarily (Marshall 2001, 20). See Cappelli (1999) for a discussion of firm-side changes leading to the rise of nonstandard employment; see also Belous (1989) for an early treatment.
- 12 For evidence on trends in firm size, see Picot and Dupuy (1996, table 1); for trends in manufacturing, see Baldwin, Jarmin and Tang (2002, tables 1, 5). The rate of net job gain is inversely related to firm size.
- 13 For a survey of the international evidence, see Higgins, Duxbury and Lee (1994). For Canadian evidence, see Higgins and Duxbury (1992); Higgins, Duxbury and Lee (1994); Duxbury, Higgins and Johnson (1999); Duxbury and Higgins (2001, 2002, 2003), and Higgins, Duxbury and Johnson (2004).
- 14 In addition, the comparison by Duxbury and Higgins (2001, 1) of the results from the 1991 and 2001 surveys is limited by the fact that the surveys were conducted as separate cross-sections, with different underlying samples, making cross-time comparisons problematic.
- 15 Specifically, the incidence of absence for personal or family reasons was about 6 percent in 1999 and 7.3 percent in 2003; days lost per full-time worker increased from just under two in 1997 to about two in 2003.
- 16 In the following discussion, for the most part, I put aside issues associated with leisure time.
- 17 Among the working-age population ages 15 and older, roughly 58 percent of females and 66 percent of males

devote no time to child care, while at least 80 percent of females and 85 percent of males provide no elder care.

18 Consider a characteristic such as income. High income is associated with a desire to work fewer hours, but high income is also highly correlated with full-time employment, greater-than-average market work hours and low unemployment, all of which are associated with a desire to work fewer hours.

19 Kahn and Lang (1992, 675) suggest that hours constraints are likely primarily in relation to unmet demand for longer hours of work.

20 In addition to the specific human capital model, Kahn and Lang (1995, 920) also consider implicit contract models and agency theory.

21 Involuntary employment also has significant business cycle and regional components; see Statistics Canada (2004a, 54).

22 In the case of daycare, scheduling conflicts could arise because daycare is normally available during regular daytime hours, while a worker may be required to work shifts, weekends or extended overtime hours.

23 Labour policies, whether or not they relate to labour standards, health and safety or labour-management relations, tend to focus on workplaces. It is generally the case, though, that much of Canadian labour policy has been designed with large, industrial-model workplaces as the model. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that services such as child care or elder care, which may be viewed as benefits, are more available in larger firms that have the resources and administrative capacity to offer them. See Chaykowski (2004) for a discussion of the challenges of implementing labour policy, using pay equity as an example, in smaller establishments.

24 See Jovanovic (1979) for a theoretical treatment of job matching.

25 See Kahn and Lang (1995) on preferences for longer hours and hours constraints, Drolet and Morissette (1997a,b) on the preference of most Canadian workers for longer hours of work and Marshall (2001) on voluntary and involuntary part-time employment.

26 Specifically, Duxbury and Higgins find that:

While a number of "family" moderators were examined in this analysis, only one had a substantive impact on all three dimensions of work-life balance: the respondents' rating of their families' financial situation...all three dimensions of work-life conflict are more problematic for families where money is perceived to be an issue...These data would suggest that while money cannot buy happiness, it can sure help people cope with work-life conflict. (2001, 161-2)

27 This approach is likely to be effective in firms or industries in which the production technology is flexible and allows firms to adopt different work arrangements or human resource practices. But where the production technology is not particularly flexible, especially in the short run, the degree of flexibility in work arrangements will be constrained by such factors as production requirements.

28 The possible roles for each of these stakeholders are emphasized by the conclusions of, for example,

Duxbury and Higgins (2001, x-xi), who suggest a variety of ways in which the main stakeholders in work and family issues can provide greater support for employee work-life balance.

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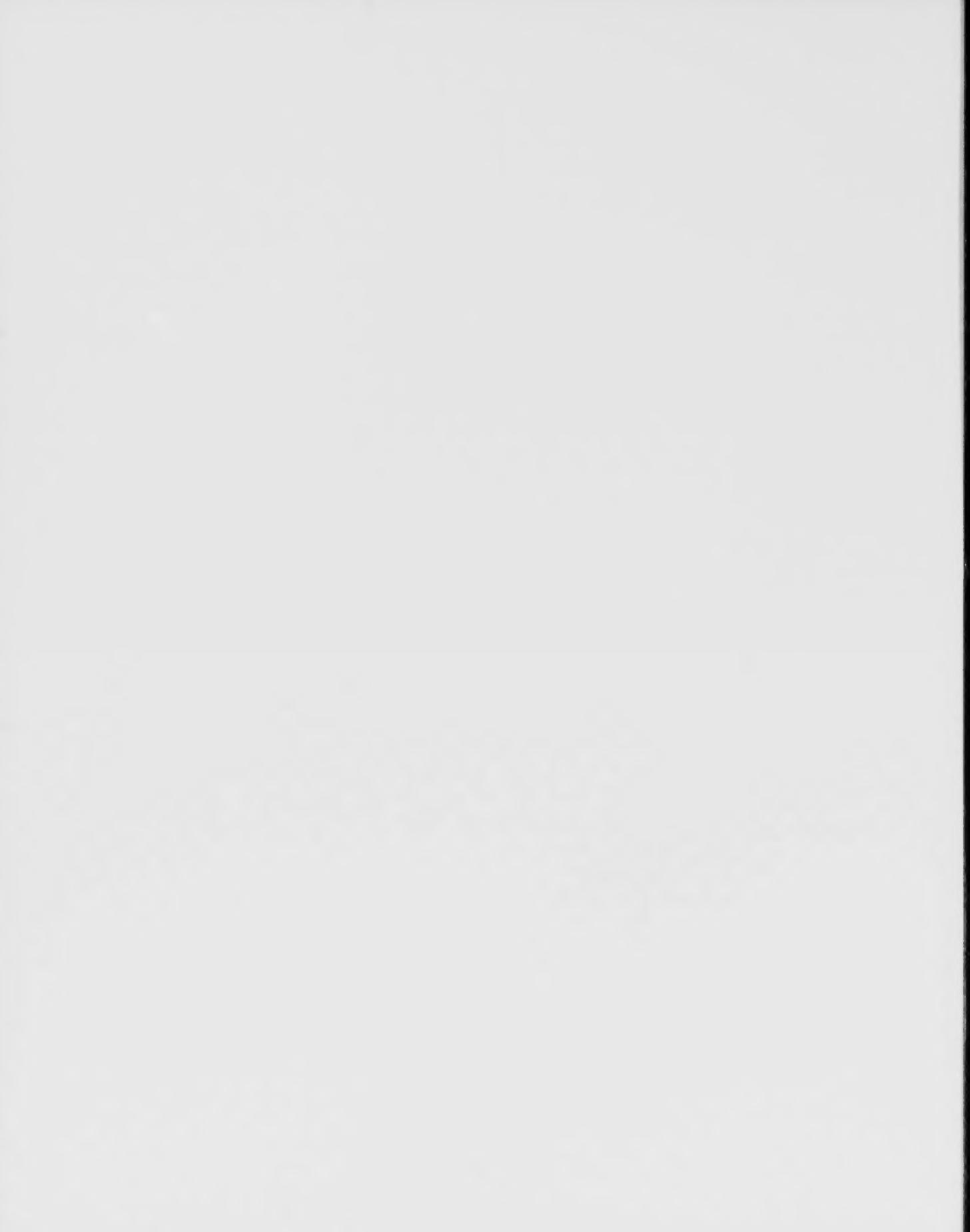
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## Résumé

**L**e marché du travail, l'emploi et la vie familiale ont connu ces dernières décennies d'importantes transformations. Ces changements ont favorisé une modification fondamentale de la répartition « traditionnelle » du temps consacré au travail hors du foyer, au travail rémunéré à la maison, aux tâches domestiques non rétribuées et aux loisirs. D'où l'intensification du débat dans les milieux politiques et la sphère publique sur une possible érosion de la qualité de la vie, tant au travail qu'au foyer. L'équilibre travail-vie s'est-il transformé en conflit travail-vie ?

Dans cette étude, Richard Chaykowski examine les données canadiennes et recense les différents problèmes liés à cette recherche d'équilibre. Il vise ainsi à clarifier les enjeux politiques qui en découlent pour mieux définir le rôle des gouvernements par rapport à celui des entreprises et des individus.

Il cherche d'abord à établir si les problèmes d'équilibre travail-vie touchent toute la population active selon qu'elle est jeune ou âgée, de sexe masculin ou féminin et qu'elle travaille à des heures normales ou atypiques. La difficulté d'équilibrer sa vie professionnelle et ses autres responsabilités obéit-elle à différentes caractéristiques selon l'âge, le sexe ou le type d'emploi ? Certains conflits vie-travail sont-ils provoqués par la faiblesse des revenus plutôt que par un horaire trop chargé ? Ainsi l'étude permet donc d'explorer plusieurs questions et de préciser quel est le profil de ceux qui disent manquer de temps, de mieux identifier les personnes qui sont les plus susceptibles de se dire stressées, et pourquoi, d'examiner en quoi y a-t-il un problème d'équité dans ce domaine, et dans quelle mesure cette réalité est-elle documentée par les diverses enquêtes sur le marché du travail ?

L'auteur aborde ces questions à l'aide d'un cadre d'analyse mettant l'accent sur l'« offre » et la « demande » de travail, de même que sur certains facteurs institutionnels. Sur le plan de la « demande », il s'intéresse aux conséquences de certaines transformations du marché de l'emploi et du milieu de travail sur la capacité des salariés d'équilibrer vie professionnelle et exigences quotidiennes. Des transformations qui englobent la modification de la taille des entreprises, la polarisation de la main-d'œuvre entre ceux qui occupent des emplois permanents à plein temps et des emplois atypiques, le vieillissement des travailleurs ainsi que l'augmentation de la participation des femmes au marché du travail.

**S**ur le plan de l'« offre », il observe que l'une des principales sources de stress réside dans les trop nombreuses exigences auxquelles les salariés ont à faire face tant dans la sphère du travail rémunéré que dans la vie familiale. Pour y voir plus clair, l'auteur examine les préférences des travailleurs en ce qui concerne les heures de travail, les contraintes qui pèsent sur l'atteinte de l'équilibre, et les exigences changeantes qui les affectent au cours de leur vie.

Pour déterminer l'étendue du conflit travail-vie et mieux identifier ceux qui risquent le plus d'en souffrir et dans quelle mesure, il passe en revue diverses statistiques canadiennes sur les congés de maladie, sur les soins non rémunérés prodigues aux enfants et aux personnes âgées, le stress, le temps consacré aux tâches ménagères et la satisfaction au travail. Il en conclut qu'une grande majorité de gens ont atteint l'équilibre désiré. Le genre, la taille de l'entreprise, le type d'emploi et les horaires de travail sont des facteurs clés dans l'émergence du conflit travail-vie. En terminant l'auteur examine comment certaines politiques du travail pourraient favoriser un meilleur équilibre vie-travail.

Quatre grandes conclusions se dégagent. Premièrement, il faut multiplier les recherches sur l'estimation des coûts du conflit travail-vie, surtout parmi les employés du secteur privé. Deuxièmement, nous devons mieux évaluer les coûts et les avantages de diverses politiques et réglementations visant l'équilibre travail-vie. Troisièmement, nous devons déterminer avec plus de précision les segments de la main-d'œuvre qui vivent un conflit travail-vie afin d'élaborer des politiques mieux adaptées à leurs besoins. Enfin, les politiques mises au point à l'intention des secteurs public et privé doivent s'insérer dans le contexte élargi du cycle de vie plutôt que dans la perspective strictement familiale.

# Summary

Toward Squaring the Circle

Work-Life Balance and the Implications for Individuals,

Firms and Public Policy

Richard P. Chaykowski

Over the past few decades, the labour market, employment, and home life have undergone significant transformation. These changes have contributed to fundamental alteration in the "traditional" allocation of time between work performed in employment settings, paid work at home, unpaid domestic work and leisure. As a result, there has been an increasing amount of debate in the public and policy spheres about whether the quality of working life and home life has been eroded. Has work-life balance been transformed into work-life conflict?

In this report, Richard Chaykowski reviews the Canadian evidence and identifies the various issues associated with work-life balance. His objective is to clarify the policy stakes in order to help define the appropriate role for governments in addressing these issues, relative to the roles of firms and of individuals.

The paper considers whether and how problems of work-life balance run across the whole spectrum of the working population, depending on whether one is older or younger, male or female, has standard or nonstandard hours. Does the problem of balancing work and other responsibilities take on different features according to age, sex, or hours? Do some work-life conflicts arise out of a lack of revenue rather than a lack of time? The author examines the profiles of people who typically take time off work (again, by gender, age, family type, and type of work), and of those who are more likely to be stressed out because of time pressures. He also asks whether there is a significant gender equity issue.

After briefly reviewing the treatment of work-life balance in other surveys, Chaykowski proposes a framework for examining its nature and implications, that builds on studies that consider "supply-side" and "demand-side" considerations, along with institutional factors. Then he examines the impact of some of the transformations that are occurring in the labour market and in the workplace on workers' ability to balance work and life demands. These transformations include changes in the size of firms; the increasing polarization of the workforce between those who have regular, full-time jobs and those who are in nonstandard jobs; an aging workforce; as well as the increasing labour force participation of women.

One of the major sources of stress is the increasing demand on our time, both in the paid work and in the home spheres. This is increasingly giving rise to prefer-

ences among workers for different schedules and more or fewer hours of work, and greater constraints on the feasibility of balancing the different demands on our time. The author also looks at the work-life balance issue within a life cycle framework. To clarify the extent of work-life conflict, who is most likely to suffer from it and to what extent, the author draws on Canadian evidence relating to sick days, provision of unpaid child care and elder care, reported stress, time devoted to housework, and satisfaction at work. From this, he concludes that a large majority of people have achieved the desired balance. Where he does observe work-life conflict, it is related to gender, the size of the firm, the type of employment, and hours. Chaykowski concludes with some observations on what labour policies might be conducive to increasing work-life balance and reducing the amount of work-life conflict.

Four key conclusions emerge from the paper. First, more research is needed to assess the extent and costs of work-life conflict, especially among employees in the private sector. Second, we need to further evaluate the costs and benefits of the various policy alternatives, such as new regulations. Third, we should determine more precisely which segments of the workforce are experiencing work-life conflict, in order to design policies that are better targeted toward those who need them most. Finally, the policies we develop vis à vis both the private and public sectors should be framed within the broader context of the whole life-cycle as opposed to the more limited perspective of the family.

